

**GUIDANCE FOR THE YOUNG ADULT:**  
A Look at Moral Development in the Christian Context

A Professional Project  
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by  
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Dedicated to  
Barbie, Loring and Julie  
for all of their guidance.

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## ABSTRACT

Exploring the concepts of moral and faith development will aid in providing an understanding of the identity crisis of the young adult. This project will focus on the questions that young persons face while involved in higher education between eighteen and twenty-five years old. This study is done to suggest that a critical period of questioning by young adults is normative, and that they can be guided with the help of an intentional support community.

This discussion uses research in the areas of moral and faith development. There is also supportive material shared from case studies of three young adults. The work of Erik Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg was chosen for the discussion of moral development. James Fowler and John H. Westerhoff, III provide the resources for faith development study.

This study concludes that the church must be intentional about creating an environment that sustains the youth to adult life transition allowing for critical examination of personal goals and decisions. In addition to a suggested model for a young adult support community, Appendix A ("Meditation and Prayer: The Journey of Yourself") and Appendix B ("Autobiography: The Stories of Our Lives") provide study aids for young adult groups.

## FOREWORD

This project comes as a result of almost a generation of living and working relationships with more than a dozen institutions of higher education across the United States. The college or university campus is a place that generates a great deal of energy. That energy promotes growth. The growth then becomes the element of change that allows the institutions to release their products for use. The product is the college student.

In the process of refinement and education, the student passes through the critical life transition of youth or adolescence to adult. Not only are students working towards learning basic knowledge and skills for a career, but they are also developing ideas, values, and insight that will blend together to create patterns for living. The patterns will inform lifestyle decisions, and help to create a person that looks toward living a full and meaningful life.

I believe that the Christian community can touch the very core of the experience of the college student. At a time when they are very vulnerable they are also open to the spirit of a faith that promises hope, vision and renewal. The Christian tradition and the church can provide a stable nurturing environment for the young person, who in the midst

of higher education, seeks a place of support, inspiration and nurture.

This study is a result of my experiences as a student, a residence hall director, an assistant dean, a campus minister, chaplain, and most of all, a Christian. I hope herein to communicate the power of my own renewed vision and commitment to our young sisters and brothers who are seeking strength and support as they enter responsible adult life. I want to offer an invitation to focus a portion of the ministry of the church on a group who is still unwrapping their gifts in hopes that we may inspire the appropriate investment of their many beautiful treasures.

We can change the world through our commitment to all generations as we participate in the Christian faith community. The sharing of a vision, the creation of patterns of responsible lifestyle will help our young people to be inspired to become builders of a new kingdom on earth.

## CHAPTER ONE

### SETTING THE STAGE: UNDERSTANDING LIFE PATTERNS

#### Lesson One

We see patterns  
We sense rhythms  
We respond instinctively  
to repetition, to likeness,  
to sequence.

Patterns are the result  
of the cognitive equipment  
we use to know our world.

Only in our memory,  
only through our perception that  
this event has happened before,  
this object is like that object,  
this behavior always follows  
that stimulus,  
do patterns exist. (1)

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Art is the imposing of  
a pattern on experience  
and our aesthetic enjoyment  
is in recognition of the  
pattern.

\*

Alfred North Whitehead  
Dialogues, 1953 (2)



## I. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: PATTERNS FOR LIFE

Human development is a series of life patterns that begins at birth and continues throughout life. This project seeks to address the patterns in the development of the young adult age group (18 to 25). I will focus on the process of growth and transition in young adults with the goal of influencing them to be ethical decision-makers guided by role models, spiritual support and the ministry of the local church. This study is especially written to influence programs with young persons who are in higher education and in a relationship to a local church.

My goal as an educator is to help persons establish themselves as a "meaningful whole." It is important to bring to a unity various aspects of life experience to help them function as parts of a working whole. To bring compatibility to mind, body and spirit, is to encourage young persons to live in community, to seek that which is excellent in life, and to seek harmony with their personal life story and experience. The goal of the Christian message is to create an openness to life and an approach to the self and the community that inspires and guides one in the process of living. Therefore, as a Christian educator it is important to communicate effective ways of relating the Christian message so that wise life-decisions can be

made.

This sort of education causes us to look at life patterns, and to become involved in helping to create in young people a vision and a response to situations in a changing world. This response comes from an understanding that whole persons involve all aspects of their lives in their decisions. Young people must be gently guided and supported as they reach the age where individuals are confronted with serious decisions and questions that are integral to their function as responsible adults.

In a culture and a technological age that daily confronts change, transition, automation, instability of the traditional family unit and high geographic mobility, it is important that learning and development include and focus on the individual's ability to make decisions that express strong values and reinforce both the potential of the individual and also the context of the greater good. The church must take part in the process of moral development and ethical vision that prepares the young adult for full and responsible participation in the human community.

The thesis of this text is that the church must take an honest, intentional and supportive role in helping young adults to be ethical decision-makers. In the contemporary world, difficult issues of the technological age (such as nuclear power, genetics, mass communications and biological warfare) need to be confronted by responsible Christians who are guided by their commitment to the Christian faith.

Spiritual and ethical patterns for decisions will be facilitated by sharing role models, learning about issues and their ethical implications and sharing the hope of the church in the community. This will enable the young adult to reach decisions and form values that will contribute to the support and growth of the total Christian community.

## II. CONFRONTING THE IDENTITY CRISIS

The questions of identity and purpose are well known as a part of human development. In the transition from adolescent to adult (what we will call young adult), the meaning and purpose of life is examined as the young adults begin to put perspective on the world and their role in it. The years of identity crises set the stage for dramatic and critical review and examination of personal beliefs. During the period of identity crises, adult behaviors and commitments are shaped. This shaping takes place based on childhood formative experiences and values that are questioned and clarified during the identity crisis. If we were to search for a time to affect the greatest positive and creative influence on the faith, life, belief and commitment of the adult, we would find this age of youth perfect for shaping and gently guiding persons into their adult futures.

There are four aspects of the period of the identity crisis identified by Erik Erikson and summarized by Wright:

1. Persons feel a sameness and continuity in themselves and parallels in their view of the world.
2. One becomes aware of an identity, but at the same time may not be in touch with motivations that are operating on a subconscious level.
3. Identity comes to the fore with a new emergence of the development of body, mind and social

orientation that has not previously been possible.

4. The new identity is a product of past stages of life and life history, it is dependent on a youth culture and the promise of an envisioned future of adulthood.(3)

This identity crisis is found by Erikson to be the most common crisis of older youth (included in what we here call young adult).

A cacophony of choices exist, and doubt and confusion overwhelm the mind of the youth.(4) The end of adolescence is beset by the need for a sense of integrated and consistent ego identity. The youth most often suffers with feelings of inferiority and questions religion and family beliefs and practices.(5) For the young adult, everything is changing at once. The young person often has a sense that the world is falling apart, when in reality s/he is in the midst of some of the most important parts of creation.

Contemporary cultural activity has a great effect on the youth identity crisis. No longer is there a necessary rootedness to family, extended family and community. Technological and informational transitions are rapid. The environment and even facts no longer stay the same for long periods of time.

From birth the individual reacts and interacts with time and situations largely based on the present moment. During the time of identity crises, history and life experience begin to interplay with behavior and

decisions.(6) The individual's world begins to expand beyond parents, family and school to community and vocation. The putting together of an identity calls for many heretofore disconnected parts to come together as a working whole. During the period of identity crisis, the individual is working toward independence and autonomous existence.(7)

The new person has a need for reflection and introspection. A new concept emerges of the interplay between time, values and identity. A repudiation of some values and a narrowing of choices occurs. The individual begins to take responsibility for moral standards and decisions.(8) The result of the identity crisis is the formation of a personal ideology which orders a meaningful overall scheme of things and creates a compelling vision of the future with which the youth can identify.(9) The ideology is the connector that draws together so many parts into a working whole. New boundaries, new relationships and a new sense of discipline and commitment are formed. The identity crises set the youth in motion. From this point, the individual gains confidence that they can improve on the past. In addition, vocational choices are made based on the individual's newly forming concepts of self.(10)

The period of identity crisis is often considered a "coming of age." Youths begin to explore outside their own world. Exploration of the world looks forward in anticipation to a future and adult roles. A vision comes into focus that looks to the future with hope.

The period of the identity crisis in youth is a fertile time for shaping and molding behavior, but it does not come without resistance and confrontation to outside factors and influence. For example, the radical youth culture of the sixties was angry and confrontive with social and political systems. A great deal of violence and bitter isolation occurred for a whole generational subculture that sought its identity at the expense of tradition, institutions and social and government systems. This crisis of cultural and personal identity illustrates the struggle and confusion during a time of life when persons attempt to cope with the future, while attempting to change the world. Much can be learned from this historic period of public identity crisis. Such a public and unified crisis for youth in a culture is not always so evident, but a time where individuals confront their own issues, ideas and futures is almost always inevitable. Age old institutions like the Christian Church can provide the nest or environment for future movement, while our youth are learning to fly.

Erik H. Erikson in "The Problem of Ego Identity" provides information that will assist our attempt to create an environment appropriate to the support of youth in the period of identity crisis.(11) He offers: Adolescence (the period preceeding the onset of the identity crisis) is the last and concluding stage of childhood. The adolescent process however, is complete only when individuals have

subordinated their childhood identification to a new kind of identification. The young individual is forced into new choices and decisions which lead to an irreversible role pattern and then on to "commitments for life." (12) When these irreversible decisions or life patterns are moving into place, the society must offer individuals "psychosocial moratoria" during which time a lasting pattern of "inner identity" is scheduled for relative completion. This period of hibernation or even construction, a time set aside, allows for the individual to find a niche in some section of society. This niche becomes firmly defined and appears to be uniquely created for the individual youth. (13)

In finding this niche, the young adult gains a sense of inner certainty and social sameness which will bridge what the youth was as a child and what the youth is about to become. This moratorium, which helps in locating the personal niche also allows youths to reconcile their conception of themselves and the communities recognition of them. (14)

The most important thing that Erikson shares for the content of this project is that an individual's identity formation must be responded to and given status by allowing her/him to have a function in a community. In this way, a person's gradual growth and transformation takes place in a situation of support and advocacy. A person begins to make sense of her/himself when s/he is given a task to do in a situation of support. (15) The continuing lifelong process



of development makes sense only when the community supports it and permits individuals to orient themselves to a "life plan."(16)

When possible then, the identity crisis should be surrounded by a community of support, advocacy and affirmation. The individual is never an island. A person grows and develops always in interaction with generations and society.(17) The necessity of the individual's maturing identity is viewed within the context of society which either provides or denies the needed affirmation. The society must provide the opportunity for development of a meaningful ideology. Even with the sometimes disruptive and discomfoting behavior of youth; loud music, strange clothes, clanishness, and intolerance of others (a defense against their own lack of identity), those in responsible positions must deal positively with the transitoriness and uncertainty of the youth in crisis. We must allow for an environment that encourages strong identity formation.

The church must take initiative to support youth in transition without judgment or narrow definitions of behavior. We must demonstrate to our young adults that they are loved and accepted in the midst of change. Especially for those who seek the counsel of the church, we must first initiate an understanding of wholeness that is finding meaning amidst a diversity of experience and life functions.(18) Second, we must provide the opportunity for the individual to adopt an ideology, that is a set of ideas

that makes sense out of life, bringing vision, reason, feelings and understanding to life's purpose. Next, we must help to illumine a vision of a future in which the experiences of previous stages of development will find fulfillment in the quest of youth seeking identity.(19) Finally, we must present the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the righteousness, grace and beneficence of the almighty God as a "compelling power" worthy of fidelity, giving meaning and structure to life.(20)

### III. AFFECTING LIFE PATTERNS

The following chapters in this project will deal with the understanding from developmental theory of the stages experienced by the older youth or young adult. Included will be a Biblical reflection of Jesus' confrontation with the ideas of youth and society, case studies of contemporary youth in the period of identity formation, and some suggestions for the local church to consider as guidelines for a ministry of affirmation for young persons in transition to adult.

This study will use library research and case study. My intent is to relate the scholarly research to the lives of real persons involved in the process of higher education and Christian education in the local church. The purpose is to discover appropriate forms of guidance and support for young adults involved in Christian education in the local church. With a thematic focus on understanding and responding to life patterns, I will discuss the importance of education for ethical decision-making. The appendix includes two study guides that are examples of materials that can be used in work with young adults. These guides are models for encouraging spiritual growth through prayer (appendix A) and examples of persons who have made the choice to be responsible decision-makers (appendix B).

This project is designed to address the current need in the local church and to provide a serious intentional environment for education and growth in the Christian community. The target population for this study is the eighteen to twenty-five year age group, with an emphasis on those who are involved in the process of higher education in a college or university system.

I believe that the church and especially programs of education and nurture in the local church, must give attention to the needs and questions of the young adult during the period of identity crisis in the youth to adult transition. This study aims to objectify the needs of the young adult who is in the educational process and is learning not only in the academic environment, but is also under the influence of the social/cultural context to make certain lifestyle decisions.

This project makes no attempt to make a critical survey of material available in the area of human development. The concepts of moral development and spiritual formation are shared, however, to provide an understanding upon which to base a Christian community construct for support and growth of young adults.

The focus here is on the growth and development of the young adult (18 to 25). The hope is that this treatment of available research and case study will aid in teaching our young adults and facilitating their commitment to a Christian lifestyle.

CHAPTER ONE: FOOTNOTES

1. "Lesson One," Alive Now  
15(January/February 1985) 4.
2. Ibid.,15.
3. J. Eugene Wright, Erickson: Identity and Religion  
(New York: Seabury Press, 1982) 78.
4. Ibid., 78.
5. Ibid., xii.
6. Arthur J. DeJong, Making It To Adulthood  
(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972) 139.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 144.
9. Ibid.
10. Wright, 73.
11. Erik H. Erikson, Identity and the life Cycle  
(New York: International University Press, 1960)
12. Ibid., 110.
13. Ibid., 111.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 113.
17. Wright, 81.
18. Ibid., 79.
19. Ibid., 81.
20. Ibid.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A STUDY OF MORAL AND FAITH PATTERNS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

#### Lesson Two

Patterns  
let us repeat.  
Blueprints guide  
the scissors,  
the saw, the torch.  
Models show the way. (1)

\*\*\*\*\*

New creation, a new heaven  
and a new earth, newness of  
life - these are the  
promises that our patterns  
will be broken and our  
beliefs changed. (2)

## I. OVERVIEW

The crises and questions of youth are a normal and predictable period of experience in the human developmental stages. This chapter will present an overview of moral development. I will also discuss one current theory of faith development. The goal of this discussion will be to encourage development toward maturity by providing for young adults an environment of support within the faith community.

First, I will look at "The Philosophy of Moral Development" by Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg intends to present a practice of moral education for the school system. His thorough study has implications for an "interdisciplinary" approach to morality and moral development. Kohlberg presents a developmental theory that represents a structure of moral consciousness. His work is important in the recognition of implicit and explicit moral learning. Kohlberg acknowledges that there are differences in moral valuation based on the impact and influence of the environment in which one lives. His stages of development suggest that individuals develop at different times and as a result of different influences. His suggested framework allows us to look at the factors that influence the decision-making process.

Following up on Kohlberg is James Fowler in Stages

of Faith. Fowler treats the faith process in stages of development that have implications for understanding behavior in the moral context. His stages follow the process of belief and behavior from infancy to adult, suggesting a movement of mind and spirit based on experience and growth.

Finally, I will look at John Westerhoff and particularly the "Search for Community" in Will Our Children Have Faith? Westerhoff is particularly focused on the implications of the contemporary culture for a new style of religious education through interaction in the faith community, God's revelation in the Biblical context and the person's ability to interpret the meaning of these revelations in day-to-day living.

By synthesizing the implications of the human structural development of moral revisioning, I hope to develop a model of spiritual formation for the contemporary young adult involved in the Christian community.



## II. MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Kohlberg opens the exploration of human development suggesting that education can stimulate moral change, by making a conscious effort to shape the understanding of ethical behavior. By moral development he means "the encouragement of a capacity for principled moral judgment and the disposition to act in this capacity." (3) Kohlberg believes that there are stages of maturity that allow one to move into understanding and interpreting behavior, and especially cultural behavior and practice, as one is in the process of education. The stages of moral thinking or view are defined as total ways of thinking. (4) And these ways are the direct internalization of external cultural norms. (5) Moral development encourages an understanding of the moral value of human life. Within the educational context, persons are encouraged to discuss and reflect on human systems. (6) The goal of education for conscious moral development encourages persons to investigate ethical principles rather than arbitrary cultural beliefs. (7)

Kohlberg enforces that moral development increases a sense of making a commitment to a group. His stages of moral development encourage the differentiation of moral and ethical value from cultural rules and standards.

In the contemporary systems of institutional

education, little conscious thought is given to the results of certain kinds of cultural practices. Kohlberg offers a solution to the ethical crisis of education and lifestyle decisions. If we consider moral development a conscious part of our basic educational goals, we can assist young persons in the mature development of outlook and lifestyle. Decisions and problems will be viewed with an understanding of bias, prejudice and consequence when we allow for an interactional relationship between moral development and educational growth. Persons grow in situations that confront personal bias and promote a new value orientation.

Moral education suggests that all institutions and societies are alike in their system of defined roles. Rules are made for the welfare of others and to promote justice.(8) Education that does not promote this understanding does nothing for creating good moral values. Kohlberg encourages that the structuring or shaping of action happens by persons taking new roles, viewing situations from another's point of view, and becoming involved in the resolution of conflict. A conscious approach like this to the moral and ethical views of young adults goes hand in hand with their academic learning environment. A biology major cannot make a judgement on artificial insemination without a moral valuation. An economics major cannot affect a response to poverty in third world countries if his/her point of view emerges from an understanding of import/export rules but does not include an

understanding of human justice. A computer analyst cannot be objective about data concerning imigrants from Haiti without making a moral response to the needs of those persons. Moral development means that persons function in the world with values that allow them to make ethical responses to human situations.

Moral development means presenting genuine moral conflict in the educational arena, and jousting with it. It means stimulating autonomous thought and action without cultural indoctrination. Moral development means teaching people to be in the pursuit of justice.(9) During their time of question, young adults need to confront experiences that differ from their own. Their development comes then as the result of new elements into the "lifestyle stew." Maturity cannot happen in an environment of "sameness." There must be challenge and confrontation with new points of view and a vigorous push to see variant possibilities for behavior and decision based on one's background and life experience.

Developmental education is the process of education that promotes a larger view of the world as individuals move in response to positions of responsibility and action in that world.

### III. FAITH DEVELOPMENT

In Stages of Faith, Fowler explores development of faith from childhood to adult. Fowler goes beyond Kohlberg's moral structure to add an additional perspective on the development of faith, as a part of the process of growth and response to life and decision-making. Fowler's theory reflects on the concept that life patterns are shaped by our interpretation of larger patterns of action that impinge upon us.(10) It is these patterns of trust and commitment that shape and sustain our lives. The dynamics of faith cause persons to make and maintain meaning in life.(11) Faith development comes as the result of a change in patterns between an active innovative subject and a dynamic changing environment.(12)

The college youth in the process of higher education is active in the pursuit of knowledge, decisions about life, vocation and future, and is usually immersed in a new environment. The new environment brings into play new ways of seeing the world. It produces different ways of thinking and calls for renewal of faith in response to different ways of living. The world of the college youth is not static. It calls for what Fowler calls revelation; the growth in faith that results from life crisis, challenged by disruptions in life and experience.(13)

Faith development is understood as taking place through an interactional process. It comes as the result of young persons' efforts to restore balance between themselves and their environment when they have encountered new ways of seeing and doing things that have caused an imbalance or disequilibrium.(14) Faith development deals with affections as some development theories have not. It also takes account of intuition and imagination. Fowler's faith development theory suggests that we in the church need to respond to our youth with an awareness that we are formed in social communities, and that as those communities change and challenge us, our faith changes.(15)

Faith development assists our understanding of the young person in crisis. It helps us to look at stages of faith transition that many encounter during the period of identity crisis. According to Fowler, the optimum time to move from a conventional faith to a reflective faith is at the young adult age (through mid to late twenties). Education and nurture should reflect transition from home and stable surroundings to a move into new surroundings. This period of struggle and challenge is ours to nourish and nurture. As our young people learn, we can learn with them and teach them and guide them into new ways of seeing and acting in the faith. Faith development reminds us that as the human community we require meaning; we require the ordering of our purpose and priorities, and we require the ability to grasp the bigger picture of life.(16)

Faith is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relationships that make up our lives. Faith is a way of seeing one's self in relation to others against a background of meaning and purpose.(17) The Christian church and the local manifestation of that institution give and set the scene for meaning and purpose for many persons in community. The young adult age group is one part of that community that comes seeking help with not only the maintenance of faith, but the polishing of tools for visioning and changing. The church must invest in the development of these tools. As we build the environment of nurture and support for our youth, we are helping them to shape their patterns of commitment and trust that will sustain them in life.

The development of faith calls for the continual search for an overarching, integrating and grounding trust, in a center of value and power sufficiently worthy to give our lives unity and meaning.(18) Faith involves vision. Faith development means revisioning. Faith gives a shape to the strivings and hopes of our life vision. Faith development calls upon persons to place into the center of their lives that which has value and meaning and gives them worth. Faith development helps us to be intentional about decisions and commitments that we make in our lives. It allows for reflecting on events that shape our lives, lifestyles and identities. We learn to respond with a deeper understanding of our actions.

Fowler has found that a common movement for the young adult age is from the stage three level of faith (synthetic-conventional faith) to stage four (individuative-reflective faith). Young adults might be in other stages, however as much variation exists in the rate of development through the stages. Stage three provides a coherent orientation amidst a diverse range of involvements; family, school and community.(19) For the stage three person, God is often viewed as a divinely personal significant other. God is a companion who provides guidance and support. At this stage, adults can assume a role of support by providing a positive self-image for a young person.(20) For the stage three person, authority is the infamous group "they" or "everybody". Persons gain an awareness of values and normative behavior, but a value system has not been made an object of reflection.(21)

In stage three, meaning and symbol are bound together, and ritual must be upheld to facilitate a transition to the next stage. At this point individuals take little time for introspection. Their energies are concentrated on influences outside of themselves. This is a time when individuals seek to establish themselves as a part of a group or community and search for relatedness.(22) Each one tries to fit in, and allow a group or community to help identify expectations or duties. Stage three is the conformist time. It is a point where the behavior of faith is tuned to the expectations of others.

Movement to stage four is often stimulated by "leaving home." This movement is both a physical and spiritual move. Stage four awakens in individuals the idea that social class and cultural environment shape people's behavior (their own and others). This new consciousness awakens an individual to the fact that group histories influence behavior and experience and outlook. At this time, tacit systems of belief and faith are replaced by the explicit. Persons begin to come apart from conventional moorings to reflect and question as they begin to shape a new identity in faith.(23)

The transition to stage four has two necessary components. First, an interruption of reliance on external sources of authority occurs and second, authority is relocated to one's self.(24) This transition is facilitated by looking at other persons and the influences of their shaping and coming to an understanding of social systems. Stage four begins with introspection and critical questioning.



#### IV. THE FAITH COMMUNITY

Finally, we consider our role as the church, the faith community, the place where the nurturing of our youth takes place. Faith is no small agenda of the Christian community, but all too often faith is something that is static and immobile. John H. Westerhoff challenges the church to be the community of support and nurture, and to provide education that informs and guides our children. The definition of community is the gathering of people that share memory and tradition.(25) A community shares "unity in essentials, in understandings, values and ways." The people in community possess a clear identity.(26) The presence and interaction of three generations characterize the community for the ideal interaction for growth. The first generation is the generation of vision. The second is the generation of the present. The third generation provides memory.(27) There is no vision without memory and the second generation provides the daily confrontation with reality. The true community unites all of these roles. The understanding of the status of each is vital to the corporate life of the whole.(28) True community has persons with diverse gifts. Those gifts are acknowledged and recognized as vital to the life and health of the whole.

The communities of faith in the church can provide

without manipulation the resources that constitute an ideal environment for growth. In the midst of the young adult crisis and quest, the church remains the system that can bring vision through reliable forms of experience and reflection. The true community relies on ritual.(29) Ritual provides the means to order and reorder life. Established ritual provides purpose and meaning. As understanding and meaning change, so does ritual. New ritual is required to symbolize the new meanings or changes in our lives. To transmit faith is to include the generations in the celebration of ritual. The central celebration is Sunday liturgy. In this celebration all of the generations should take part.

The true community observes "crisis rites" (like birth, first communion or confirmation, divorce, marriage, death, retirement) in acknowledgement of: 1. a separation phase, where persons withdraw or change their previous status, 2. a time of transition which prepares people through ceremony or training (or even ordeal) and 3. a time of re-entry.(30) The recognition of crisis rites as a part of the normal life of the community celebrates the life and times of the youth in crisis. The period of crisis calls for stories of inspiration and motivation, especially interpretation and restatement of the Gospel. The heart of the Gospel tells the story of those who are "accepted though unacceptable."(31) A time of feeling on the fringe is a time to hear and confront the heart of the Gospel message.

Persons learn through their experience and through relating their experience to the greater story. The Gospel stories touch the lives of everyone, and each can learn from it in a time of transistion and movement.

The true community evidences itself through action. We learn the implications of our faith through the ways we are encouraged and stimulated to act in the world. As the community of faith, the church is called to join God in historic liberating acts.(32) We need to explore the nature and character of our individual and corporate actions in the world.(33) Christian response and action go hand in hand with education. Each action, thought, and concept that is taught to our youth must stimulate a Christian response. Our young people must be encouraged to relate academic information to the ideals that inform their faith. Serious spiritual reflection must be a part of their learning experience. We must teach our young people to investigate aspects of their lifestyle. We must encourage our youth to question and confront their history, their scientific and business acumen, and their knowledge and understanding of philosophical truth. The church needs to have people to think politically, socially, economically, theologically and ethically. We must turn jobs into vocations, and daily decisions into ethical decisions informed by Christian faith.

Christian education in response to the needs of the community should inform persons in their expressions of the

Christian tradition. Our spiritual life should be enhanced and sustained, and we should equip and motivate our members for action in the world. The community of faith has a dynamic and moving history. It is essentially a community interacting with a living tradition.(34) The tradition of the church in relation to persons and their involvement with the world must be transmitted through our educational programs. We can help to motivate our youth to a commitment to God's vision for their lives and for the world when we teach them about that vision.

A true community of faith focuses on the needs of persons. Faith is more than knowing. As persons who are alive and interacting in the life of the world, we are called to live consciously in the presence of God. Our God, who acts in history, acts through the lives of persons who are a living commitment to establish the Kingdom of God. Living in prayer is living with a conscious awareness of God's presence in our lives and in our actions.(35) Prayer is a radical ethical activity, a passionate action that results from both intuition, and intellect. Prayer is feeling right about doing God's will. Prayer is learning to know God's will.(36)

Finally, a true community educates its youth to have visions, hope and power in society. We are called to live in hope and to inspire hope. We must encourage social action that confronts evil and injustice. We are called to motivate continual confrontation with systems and

institutions that negate justice and equality. We are called to stand for the power of the Christian tradition to transform our society. For Christians in community our power is wisdom, vocation and corporate response to be enablers. The church must teach that we are a witnessing community of faith.

## V. REFLECTIONS ON THEORIES

Kohlberg describes how moral development is a part of human development. Growth allows for new understanding of ways of seeing and doing. Fowler adds that faith development, as related to the concepts of moral development includes "intuition and imagination." Finally, Westerhoff instructs the community of faith, the church, on keeping the faith alive and relevant.

In working with young persons involved in the contemporary crunch of academics and faith, I have seen a reticence to question or confront authority and an honest fear of change. Often, it is apparent that individuals view maturity as a time when one settles down, not a time when one makes a move or change. In the presence of sound theory, I would like to suggest that the faith community must be the catalyst for change in the young adult. We must look at the time of the youth crisis as a time where we encourage persons to let go, rather than to hold on. The spirit of change and revisioning comes about as the result of a personal jolt, or in traditional language, revelation. In response to the theories of Kohlberg, Fowler and Westerhoff, I would propose the following guidelines for the local church, as they consider and construct a ministry for the young adult who is in crisis and often in transition.

First, in the context of the church community, there are many smaller groups that function as support and motivation for persons gathered together. I believe that when possible, the creation of a peer support community for young adults is valuable. This group can include young adults usually out of high school. They will be in the process of vocations and higher education. The group should have a focus for content and purpose. These might include fellowship and recreation, Bible study (or some other form of study that permits question and reflection), a church school curriculum or a guided program for discussion of contemporary problems and issues that call for Christian response. The group should be well organized and led and supported by other adults who have time and interest in the young adult age group. It is important to add that significant adult resourcing of such a group helps to identify role models or persons worthy of trust.

Young adults in a peer support context can provide for one another a stability in the midst of change. A peer group that is encouraged to know one another learns to make a commitment to work for the life and vitality of the group which serves as a kind of family.

Next, I would suggest the component of involvement. A peer support system cannot operate in isolation, and a "college youth Sunday" does not illustrate the commitment of a congregation to the experience and life of the faith community. An often spoken cliché states that our youth are

not the church of tomorrow, but they are the church of today.

We must include our youth in all aspects of the corporate church life. They should be visible on boards and committees, in volunteer and service organizations, and helpers at church suppers. Our youth should be trained to teach church school classes and other educational forums. Their visible presence should be a part of the Sunday morning worship experience. An investment in the intentional development of leadership in our youth is a part of the responsibility of the church community. In addition to the separation of a peer support system, we must create meaningful intergenerational experiences, so that the generations of vision and memory can share and sustain one another.

Finally, I would suggest a component of cultural and social confrontation. Our churches live too much in their own world. We must create opportunities for our youth to live in and experience different cultural and social environments. A change in geographic location can help to dispel our tendencies towards regionalism. Work projects where persons live and work beside people in different economic or ethnic backgrounds can help to broaden the understanding of another group's history. Study and discussion with persons who have lived and worked in third world countries can help persons to confront racism. The possibilities for exposure to different experiences of life



are endless. The idea is to pull away from a lethargy of sameness, ignorance and comfort. The church as the vital instrument of the Gospel of Jesus Christ confronts age-old distinctions and exclusions of persons who are different.

The fantastic, detailed and complex theories of human behavior help us to understand our experience. Our vision for the future, and for the life and health of our youth precipitates our intention to nurture, educate, and shape an environment that includes change, reflection and action.

While in the process of academic course work, we should provide opportunities for study in the Christian community. Out of our tradition and the needs of our youth, I would offer two studies: "Prayer and Devotion" (Appendix A) and "the Stories of Our Lives" (Appendix B). These two group studies will give young adults the opportunity to build support among themselves as they share and learn in a small group setting, strengthen their personal convictions and learn from the experience of others. Study in community emphasizes the traditions and ways of the Christian faith. These studies alongside of academic pursuits will encourage our young adults to pursue their education with an eye to education of the mind and spirit. Study in the community of faith teaches persons how to be catalysts for change. In the context of a small group sharing, for which Appendix A and B are designed, there is the opportunity to focus on specific needs and questions of individuals. Along with

leader facilitation, there is the chance for peers to support one another in seeking answers to life questions and faith struggles. Small group opportunities also encourage involvement and commitment. Persons work together to hear and care for one another, as well as learning to make a commitment to a community. The small group can also provide opportunities for learning beyond one's own experience. The group in the interaction of learning together can begin to understand different life experiences. This kind of sharing in a situation that builds trust over time, can allow for insight into different cultural experiences, and different ways of confronting and solving personal dilemmas.

In the small group model for spiritual growth (Appendix A) the focus for study is reflection on one's own life experience. The study guide provides components for discussion and reflection on one's personal faith. There is opportunity for question of one's personal motivation and values. There is also the opportunity to compare personal life stories and experiences of personal faith. The study on prayer encourages persons to assume prayer as a lifestyle. It encourages questions, struggles and confrontation with difficult personal issues. The study of prayer in community models for persons in a learning environment a component of commitment to a Christian lifestyle.

The Study Guide B, "The Stories of Our Lives" is an opportunity to examine the life stories of persons who have

encountered strong personal challenges and made a commitment to a Christian lifestyle. It allows persons who are at a transition point in their own faith journey to study the experiences and decision process of others who have faced questions. This study provides confrontation with hard issues such as life, racism, sexism, poverty and shows how persons have spoken and acted to confront injustice and allowed their faith to inform their lives and actions.

Study and reflection can help persons to form new patterns of thinking and new ways of acting. The sharing of a community can be the catalyst for individuals to take steps to reconstruct old ways. An experience of a renewal for young adults in transition is born of the trust and support of peers and the inspiration and commitment of persons who live faithful lifestyles.

CHAPTER TWO: FOOTNOTES

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## CHAPTER THREE

### TOWARDS A NEW VISION

#### Lesson Three

Patterns  
make us repeat.

Stereotypes lessen  
our seeing.  
Habits let us act  
without thinking.  
Old patterns of  
relating cripple us,  
close us off  
from the good in us,  
the good in others.(1)

## I. NEW VISION

In the process of growth the young adult has to confront tradition, and age-old ways of understanding. As in the turmoil of the sixties, the confrontation can sometimes be violent and earthshaking. When the youth confronts the community of tradition with a new vision, old patterns and old ways must stand the test of transition. With each new generation comes a new vision and a new understanding of what it means to live with the healing transforming touch of Jesus Christ. When we encourage our young people to allow the power of Christ into their lives, we take a great risk as the guardians of tradition. A new generation with new vision forces new life upon the old ways. Sometimes the encounter with the power of Christ is a step that is made by a person who has no idea how it will turn out. At some point however, a new level of spiritual maturity is reached where blindness is relieved by brilliant flashes of sight, insight into the Kingdom.(2)

In the following pericope (John 9:1-40), a young man receives the healing power of Christ into his life. Amidst the tradition of the Pharisees and the risk of exclusion from his community, he affirms new vision and faith in the power of the man Jesus Christ. The Pharisees maintain their grasp on the bonds of darkness, but the man born blind opens

his eyes in faith to a new way of seeing and living. We too are called beyond our habits of blindness to engage with our young people in God's new creation, a new way of seeing and living.



## II. THE MAN BORN BLIND

The act of seeing and the act of believing cannot in fact be separated from one another. By the fact that the apostle sees [s]he believes, and because [s]he "sees," namely the glory of the Logos and Son of God in the incarnate Jesus of Nazareth. Only if the seeing which opens our faith is penetrated by faith, will the radiant power of God appearing be disclosed in Jesus' deeds.(3)

The Gospel of John is the New Testament book of signs. It is a treatise on faith and understanding. The writer witnesses in each relationship of each story (event) that which the writer believes to have a unique and relevant significance for all generations. The writer of the fourth gospel speaks to the reader in order to make that one a believer.

John concentrates on the acts of transformation in the metaphorical language of the written word. What is offered to humankind in the life and works of Jesus Christ is a chance to change and renew an openness to new possibilities. The possibility happens because of the Logos, the word of God alive in the lives of the people. With the possibility of renewal, comes the opportunity to celebrate in "light" of the saving powers of the manifestation of God in the flesh. Jesus Christ in the fourth gospel is the saving sign of God; the hope of humankind.

The writer of the Gospel of John sets out to

emphasize the experience of the saving power of the Logos. Each event celebrates the hope of transformation, which shines through the interaction of Jesus with persons in crisis. The Gospel of John goes beyond the immediate event, with the use of language to indicate the possibility of transformation through faith and understanding. In the process of transformation comes the acts of judgment and witness. Each one, in order to "see" the change that takes place must confess to the saving act of Jesus, and therefore stand in judgment.

One of the signs or sources in John is sight. It is the gift that is offered in the light of the Kingdom of God, by the Christ whose purpose it is to combine two worlds that are ultimately and intentionally to be one.(4) The gift of sight happens upon confession of Jesus as the source or "light," through which the one without sight gains new possibilities for life. There is an exciting sense in which the source of the sight and the source of the light, transform that one who stands in judgment. There is with the "sight" a "light" which brings a source of power; that is the transformation.

Sight becomes "insight," and the possibilities for life are changed because of personal encounter, a change from within, and the power to live again (renewed), with new and positive insight.

In the pericope of the man born blind, the saving and transforming act of Jesus removes the man from his old

world, and emerges him into an entirely new and powerful sense of self. The change in him (sight and insight) is possible because he has faith that transforms him, with the power of the light of Jesus Christ, into a new person. The man born blind faces judgment, and witnesses to the new source of life. He is given sight and insight, new life inside and out.

### III. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: CHAPTER NINE

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him saying, Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered them, neither this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. (John 9:1-5 RSV)

The miracle in this passage is of special significance, because it is the only one where the afflicted one is so from birth. This affliction gives the disciples the chance to ask of Jesus a question which addresses a particular theological concern. In Jewish tradition, there was the connection of suffering and/or affliction with sin; either that of the afflicted or his or her parents. Jesus addresses his disciples and says to them that there is no sin, only the presence of affliction in order that he (Jesus) may have the opportunity to show what God can do. In this sense, the miracle in the Gospel of John is always a sign of the power and glory of God. The blindness or human weakness was an opportunity for Jesus to perform a healing ministry to save a weak person. Through this example of affliction, Jesus was the saving instrument of God's goodness.

In the removal of the blindness, Jesus points to his obligation to minister, because he is "the light of the

world." In the co-existence of these two worlds; light and darkness, Jesus shines through as the true light. This light cannot shine without darkness, it is through the infirmity of physical blindness, that Jesus works the miracle of sight. That sight is the removal of physical and spiritual blindness.

Next, Jesus takes spittle and mixes it with the dirt to form a clay, and sends the man off to the pool of Siloam to wash his eyes and in so doing, the man gains sight. The man's neighbors are astounded that the beggar can see and question him as to the whereabouts of his healer. The man born blind simply responds, "I know not."

The important point is that the man born blind admitted to his infirmity, and to his healing even under pressure of public ostracism. He affirmed that Jesus wrought this miracle of sight. The man was not afraid to reveal his new gift to those around him. He came seeing for the first time and was confronted with a world that would not allow his gift to be a message or sign for all of them. There is precious little in the way of sight (insight) that one's "neighbors" will allow without the painful indignities of doubt.

And it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes...How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?(John 9:14,16)

The Pharisees do not allow that the miracle of sight can or should happen on the Sabbath. Since no labors can be performed on the Sabbath day, Jesus was labeled a sinner.

It is in the spirit of tradition and the human concepts of limited understanding that the Pharisees respond to this man who has received a whole new life. With their judgment of the man who was open to renewal and new life; they closed themselves off to the experience of God that is simply not limited to human concepts of understanding, but rather heightened by the limitless concept of faith. The man born blind believed that he would receive the gift of sight. The Pharisees believe only in their analytical and predictable religion.

There are two important points following: the open confession of the man born blind that he was healed by a prophet, and the public denial of his healing by his own parents.

And they asked them saying, is this your son, who ye say was born blind? How doth he see? His parents answered them and said, we know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age, ask him, he shall speak for himself...(John 9:19-21)

The parents of the man were afraid of the implications of Jewish law. But it does seem that such a miracle of sight, and new life would have a more profound and deeper affect on their consciousness than that of mere human regulation and meaningless limitation. Although it is not unusual for parents to raise children with an affliction for which they may feel some responsibility or guilt, what is striking is their denial of what would seem to be a blessing for them as well as for their son. The strange

separation of parent and child, even in the blessing of new life and sight, is not something that has ceased with modern times.

One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see. ...Why this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he has opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshipper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. (John 9:25b,30b,33,34)

The man born blind receives sight and insight. He confronts his community with new knowledge; the knowledge of "the light." He gains a simple and faithful understanding in the one that has given the gift of sight. That faith is the faith that allows him new openness to the work of God on earth, through a man with a gift of healing. Having received judgment and grace, the man born blind receives his gift of sight and becomes a witness to the acts of God alive in the world. The man is turned around and does not hesitate to make known his faith. This man of simple beginnings, a beggar in the street without sight, or any knowledge of the beauty of the world, receives the gifts of sight and light and does not attempt to deny his "rebirth": "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

This is the message of possibility in the ninth chapter of the Gospel of John. When we are given the possibility of new life in Jesus Christ, and we accept in faith, even at the condemnation of the Pharisees; a whole new set of horizons and possibilities will be ours.

They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. (John 9:34)

The man born blind speaks out of his faith having received a new vision. He does not have the same understanding of sight as the Pharisees, who believe only in tradition. When he is healed his new sight proclaims a new life. The Pharisees have a different understanding and cast him out. But the power of faith in Jesus Christ is clear. He brings to all who come to him in faith a new way to live.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of man?" He answered, "And who is he sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you." He said, "Lord, I believe"; and he worshipped him. Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." (John 9:35-40)

The beggar moved from physical blindness to renewal and spiritual sight. And though he is cast out of the company of the Pharisees, he is not left alone to bear witness. Jesus comes fully into the sight and knowledge of the man born blind. Not only is he given the gift of sight, but now he has the blessing of new life; in confessing that Jesus is the son of God. Very little can be experienced of the full spiritual relationship with Jesus with the gift of physical sight. A full spiritual connection with the saving grace of Jesus Christ is not understood with mere physical sight. Only by confession of the healing powers of Jesus can persons experience the renewal of life and new insight. The gift of renewal and vision is given with the knowledge



that one's life will carry on with burdens and challenge, perhaps even rejection amidst places of strong tradition, but one will not bear these burdens alone. For the giver of sight and life is also the one who reveals a new order, and it is he that sustains persons as they live in harmony with a new vision.

#### IV. MODERN VISION

The key to understanding the Gospel in light of contemporary issues is to read the text with an eye for key words and symbols. Throughout the generations, conditions of human existence remain open to question. One of the largest problems on the contemporary scene is the problem of misunderstanding between generations.

Having been a part of a community of young persons that are for the most part separated from their parents for the first time, it has been common to be the quiet observer of growth and rebellion. It is inevitable that offspring grow and in many ways shed their dependence on those persons who have sheltered them from birth. But the story in the Gospel points to a far greater implication of youth in crises. The message here seems to bear witness to the fact that the parents, important though they are, cannot be in touch with all that is of importance to the growth and fulfillment of their offspring. Here, even in the Biblical context, a parent can serve only a partial, and in some senses temporary function to the continual growth and maturity of a child. At some point each individual must endeavor to grasp a sense of reality and open up to the new visions and possibilities available.

As Christians, this issue can be taken none too

lightly. The promise of new light and new life is given to us in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is then our responsibility to learn both for ourselves, and to teach our younger generations to live in accordance with the messages of insight and enlightenment that are ours through firm conviction and acceptance of the new vision in Jesus Christ. Ironically, this means that what was traditional, may have only been functional for a short period of time. It means for all of us in all generations the message of Jesus Christ is speaking about creating a larger vision of community. It means the the old ways of racism, sexism and poverty, convenient though they may be, are only the tools of the pharisees such that they might have control and understanding of the earthly realm.

Jesus brings the possibility for the coexistence of two ways of life; the community of tradition renewed by the vision and faith of a new generation. At the risk of sounding like an outraged child of a traditional and closed minded society, one could conclude that what Jesus intends for us to understand is that new vision and turning away from the old, comes through the insight and conviction of a child. Though the man born blind was of an age to speak for himself, it is clear that only when he becomes a child, both a child of God and the outspoken child of frightened parents, does he gain the real gift of spiritual insight. The man speaks out against all that he has known in the past to assert with vigor and commitment that he is going to

speak and live and see in a new way.

The age-old trauma of generations in confrontation symbolizes that even the most important earthly tie that we know is subject to division in light of the message of Jesus Christ. It is not easy to turn against those who have protected and guided one from birth, nor is it easy for parents to allow their offspring to participate in a new vision. The value of the light of Jesus Christ cannot be measured in earthly terms.

Also, it is overwhelming to face the fact that new insight, when truly dealt with may lead to rejection from the mainstream. New vision allows for almost no limitations. But it affirms the presence and continual protection of the only and all-powerful God. The mainstream cannot understand anything that is not written down in the law books, or spoken as truth by the scholars. It then becomes uncertain to me whether or not one can remain in the exclusive bounds of the limiting and traditionally closed vision of the "church." Jesus did not bring walls to enclose, but a spirit of life and light to "open," both persons to each other, and the kingdom of God to all persons.

The story of the man born blind addresses each individual, and the whole of the human race (which includes traditional Christendom). Commitment to the vision of Jesus Christ is unconditional surrender to him in light of a new understanding of personal possibilities, because of the love

of God. This is not to make a humanitarian statement, but clearly a statement in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is not a way to receive new vision and self-consciously participate in the old. The old must pass away.

In this story, I find the antithesis of what we practice, both in our academic and institutional pursuits. We teach persons to learn and abide by narrow definitions of Christian existence. However, the Gospel seeks to dispel the notion that there can be any sort of complacency or quiet acceptance in the kingdom of new vision. One important thing to note and remember, is that there will always be a new vision. Each generation will bring a new understanding of the Gospel, in light of its own contemporary conflicts and situations. But in no generation, and in no age of humankind are we allowed to live out a vision, simply by following closely to the limiting and narrow ways of tradition.

Most exciting of all is the mission of the written word in all of this. The age-old message of the Biblical text, with the traditional language provides the constant challenge of new reading and insight. In childlike acceptance of a new order, and a new vision, we can also hear ourselves, humankind, in an echo throughout the generations, searching for the community on earth that will challenge and renew the life in each new generation.

The man born blind, is the child of awakened

possibilities. He speaks to each of us in our context, to be self-conscious about our commitment to the kingdom of God. That commitment cannot be made by immersion in old ways, but by prompt and proper acceptance of the new: "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

## V. REFLECTION ON THE LIGHT

The Christian community, the church, is a place for not just life-long support and guidance, but also a place for life-long renewal or rebirth. The social cultural rites of passage enacted in the Christian context (e.g., birth and dedication of infants, Confirmation or first communion, high school and college graduation and marriage) often overlook periods of turning or change and maturing into new lifestyles. The man born blind is like every person who accepts the conditions and circumstances of their life until someone comes along and shows to them a better way. Jesus' healing of this child-adult was also a situation of life renewal. It was a risky situation. With each life renewal comes the opportunity, even the obligation to confront the community of tradition with a new vision that calls for confrontation and personal conviction. There is, as in this story of healing, the risk of rejection. The mandate of the Gospel is, however, to renew our vision and to allow the light of renewal to shine through our conviction and lifestyle. When the healing and renewing powers of Jesus Christ are welcomed into our life vision, there is a turning, a change. We become new persons.

In the young adult crisis of maturation, there must be new vision. Individuals given the opportunity to

confront their own infirmities will likely as not, experience a kind of personal lifestyle revelation. As the Christian church community we must be ready with questions, but not judgment. We must stand aside to watch healing take place with the spirit, sensitivity and sensibility to encourage change and not condemn it.

Our youth will share their new vision with us if we incorporate it and work with it to make it a part of our total mission. We cannot mold our youth; we must guide them. They are our generation of hope.



CHAPTER THREE: FOOTNOTES

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### AN ETHICAL RESPONSE TO LIFE PATTERNS

#### LESSON FOUR

We know through patterns.

When we confront the unmeasured,  
the not-before-seen,  
we put a pattern behind it,  
we mark off its existence  
against something regular  
we already know.

Knowing is learning the patterns,  
remembering what happened last time and  
the time before that  
and realizing it happens again.  
It is learning which patterns  
can be altered,  
which rhythms need changing,  
which endure.(1)

## I. THE STORIES

Over time people develop patterns that become a way of life. In the Christian tradition worship and liturgy form the patterns of practice that give meaning to what we believe. Also in the Christian tradition we learn that our belief can cause significant changes. Our faith teaches us that we are to be agents of change, instilling in the hearts of humankind the motivation to affect justice, peace and a better world, a world that we can truly call the kingdom of God.

As we encourage and facilitate the spiritual growth and moral development in our young people, we need to encourage them to use their vision to be agents of change in the world. We must help our young people to understand that in the midst of their own pain, alienation and anxiety there is a God who works in our lives to restore hope and provide meaning. As agents of God's Kingdom, we must allow one by one our young people to make the transition to young adulthood with the support of nurturing, caring relationships. Each young person as s/he examines the style and pattern of her/his own existence, discovers the potential in her/his own life for making an impact in the world.

For each person there are times and places where

her/his story reaches decision points. At those points a person may begin to believe in a new way, and act in a new way. This new way of believing and acting is based on a new understanding of one's self as one who acts based on a conscious set of ideas. For some persons this point is gradual, for others it occurs suddenly. For each person there is a time when a new focus is most likely to take place. The task of the church in community is to motivate a decision point in the lives of growing changing individuals. Whether we refer to this turn or change in understanding as "individuating-reflective faith," or a new vision (as in the healing of the man born blind) it is a time when life patterns, ideals and beliefs begin to converge in a greater wholeness. This is the time in life when the young person begins to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his/her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes. It is a time when an individual begins critical reflection on his/her ideology, and then begins to make life decisions in response to those reflections.

A ministry to young adults should help them to bring their life stories to a turning point, a point at which new patterns of behavior and a new style of life is enacted because of stronger faith and belief.

## II. YOUTH IN CRISES; CASE STUDIES

The stories of young persons in crisis cannot be ignored, they are critical to an understanding of the needs of our young adults. My own experience in relationships with persons in higher education and the church indicates the need for three aspects of resolution for the youth in crisis. As cited by Erikson they are:

1. The need for movement or response to an "inner pulse." The youth need an opportunity to experience a movement in life or an event that celebrates a "new birth" or decision point for the future.

2. Individuals who can serve as role models or guides.

3. The transition out of identity as facilitated by community.(2)

In each of the following case studies of college youth who are involved in the church community, a potential for change is present. A resolution to crisis emerges from personal reflection in the midst of a supportive community that accepts the individual and encourages her/him to act upon a new understanding of self. Each of these youth found adults who listened to them and supported them during their

transition time. In one case the response was in the corporate support of the local church community. Finally, each youth had the opportunity to make a move because of the intentional support of a local church.

These stories may seem unusual because each comes as the result of one congregation's efforts to share in the growth and faith of a community of youth. This college group of approximately sixty college-age students enrolled in a large state university found support, love and guidance, because of the intentional efforts of a congregation. Each of those sixty young adults experienced some form of transitional crisis. The following are typical examples of youth in crisis.

### III. CASE ONE: ROBIN

The Story: Robin came almost immediately to the First United Methodist Church when he entered as a transfer student from the junior college in his home community. He began attending the church in the first few weeks in the new city where the large state university was located, and maintained regular attendance throughout his stay in the university.

Robin came from middle America. Both of his parents worked, and they lived in a modest home in a mostly upper middle class suburb. He was brought up in the church and had a healthy respect for the Christian faith and its traditions. Robin was the youngest of three children. His older brother and sister had moved away from home years before. His sister converted to Orthodox Judaism and his brother manages the produce department in a major chain grocery store in another city. Robin often spoke to me of how he felt that his parents only hope for their realizing their dreams for their children was in him. His sister had chosen another world, apart from the family tradition and his brother, who had little formal education, was not a candidate for the family "success story."

The pressure of "success," pleasing his parents and realizing his own dreams, weighed heavily on Robin. He

worked to pay a portion of his college expenses and borrowed the remainder from his parents, to pay room and board. He began early to build relationships with peers and an "adopted family" in the First United Methodist Church. He attended Sunday morning services, the college-age church school class and a Sunday evening fellowship. Robin was also active in the Bible study group and an interested participant in most of the educational functions of the church.

Early in his time at the state university, Robin received a call from his old girlfriend to inform him that she was pregnant with his child. Her hope for a solution to this dilemma was for him to come home immediately and marry her, so that they might begin to establish the traditional "home and family." Robin felt that he had made it clear to his former girlfriend that he wished to finish college, and was in no way desirous of making a life-long commitment. He felt that he had been trapped. Robin helped the young woman to pay the expenses of the birth and advised her to "put the baby up for adoption," as he had no intention of providing parental support.

During this time of crisis, Robin was also beginning to feel restless and uncertain about his ideas and dreams of success. He began to read and study and journal hoping to find some answers to his personal questions of the direction that he should go with his life. Robin's friendliness and out-going nature made it easy and comfortable to relate to



him. In spite of his personal problems and some feelings of inadequacy and guilt, he had many of the qualities of a good leader. Robin listened to his friends and cared for them, and maintained a steady and reliable presence in their lives and in the life of the church.

In the midst of the frustrations of a broadcasting major, parenting a child outside of marriage and fighting to direct his energies to fulfill what he felt to be the purpose for his life, Robin decided to enter the ministry.

The Dilemma: In spite of breaking what Robin knew to be the "the Christian moral code" by having pre-marital sex which resulted in a child born outside of marriage, he still grappled with an "inner voice" that called out the best of his leadership and personal abilities. Robin also felt a great deal of guilt. How could he, such a blatant sinner, become a minister? Never denying his wrong doing, Robin maintained a close tie to his peer support community at the church and myself (his campus minister) as well as counseling with other ministers on the church staff. During a two year period he fought and questioned, and cried and struggled concerning his decision to enter the ministry.

In the fall of 1983, Robin entered a non-denominational seminary on the east coast. He continues to struggle with maintaining his own faith and personal growth in response to his calling and he continues to suffer

periodic episodes of guilt.

The mother of the child still writes to him periodically asking him for his financial support for the child. He has no plans to marry the mother or provide parenting for the child at the time of this writing.

Resolution: Robin has a strong faith, and others have a strong confidence in him. The church and his peer support community, even without knowing all of the details, provided a place for him to make decisions and commitments. The church environment also allowed for and encouraged "non-judgmental" spiritual counsel for his growth and personal decision-making.

I believe that as Robin continues to grow he will continue to seek guidance and support. When he entered seminary, he also entered therapy for the first time. As he matures in his faith, I believe that he will come to a creative resolution for his call to ministry and his break with the "Christian moral code." I believe that Robin will find a way to exercise his commitment to ministry and take on some responsibility for the life of his child.

#### IV. CASE TWO: SHARON

The Story: Sharon is a Black American. She is the child of a man who is career military with the Air Force. The youngest of three daughters, Sharon had experienced up to the time of enrolling in the state university, movement with her family every three or four years. They had lived in several countries and quite a few states in her lifetime. Sharon came originally to the First United Methodist Church to do Sunday morning child care. Within a short period of time, she was asked to join the college church school class. From that time on, Sharon became very involved in and committed to the life of her peer support group in the church.

In her life, Sharon had had few long term friendships other than her parents and her sisters. The college support group, in which she actively participated for three years, was her first experience at long term stable relationships. Sharon had many needs that were met by the group. She needed friends that cared for her and knew how to express that caring. She needed to belong and have the support of a group. She needed leadership opportunities. Also, Sharon needed help with understanding her cultural identity and her sexuality.

Sharon did not have an easy time in social

situations. She highly disapproved of drinking or any sexual innuendo. She had a strong sense of very strict and narrow moral behavioral guidelines. She was judgmental and shared those judgments. She was unwilling to share her personal feelings and questions.

I tried to reach out to Sharon on many occasions. I made special efforts to spend time with her, and to provide opportunities for her to share her leadership abilities, especially with teen-age youth. In those times, Sharon was creative, energetic, sensitive and very dependable. It was obvious to me that her gifts were in the area of leadership for children and teens, especially teaching.

The Dilemma: Sharon only did her best in safe situations. She was not open to confrontation or even a personal quest. She was energetic and creative in places and at times, that were transitory and temporary. She could not relate to transition or depth in relationships or feelings. Sharon had not been involved in an environment that allowed relationships to grow and change in the same individual. She had never had black friends and did not seek to understand that cultural differences accompanied by judgmental and narrow behavioral patterns would alienate her peers. Sharon tried to fit into a situation and an environment where others were much more concerned about their own differences and adaptability. Sharon suffered

alone because she did not know the questions to ask.

Resolution: As yet, there is no resolution for Sharon, save hope. The church and peer environment gave her a sense of belonging that she had never known before. If she remains a part of a loving community such as the church, she will, in time, be able to understand that change, transition and commitment to long term goals and relationships will best facilitate her creative abilities.

## V. CASE THREE: SIDNEY

The Story: Sidney was raised in a strong Christian home in an upper middle class suburb in America's fastest growing city. She was a cheerleader in high school and a sorority girl in college, and was loathe to survive a semester without a male companion. Sidney was a communications major at the university, and at the time of her graduation was hired full-time time at the local independent television station where she had worked for two years.

Sidney came to the First United Methodist Church because it was the right thing to do. From the time she left home for school, Sidney visited several churches looking for a regular place to worship. Sidney became involved in the college-age church school class, and developed several important social relationships. Sidney was an active and reliable person in the church group. At the same time she participated in the church programs and activities, she was a founding member of a campus sorority and maintained high grades.

Sidney's parents are older, near retirement. She has one sister who is fourteen years older than she. She had a strong need for sharing and a sense of family. Sidney relied heavily on the church peer group to support her in

daily decisions. She called her friends regularly and maintained a very open communication. After graduation, she remained active in the church, started a new church school class for young adults and began directing a major new emphasis in the church program. She produced the 11:00 worship of the First United Methodist Church at the station where she worked.

Sidney began later in her school career and early in her professional career to question how she could be fulfilled, creative and maintain a strong sense of commitment to her Christian faith. Sidney began to experience some sexual harassment problems on the job and lost a couple of promotions to "the boss' nephew" and young men "with more experience." As Sidney became somewhat disillusioned with her real world night shift job, she put more and more energy into her volunteer time at the church.

The Dilemma: Sidney did not want her success or lifestyle to come into compromise. She was interested in finding a way to integrate her energy and creativity in response to the community of faith that was in many ways her family. Sidney's questions of purpose and fulfillment came out of her routine association with the church.

Resolution: The First United Methodist Church decided to make the television and video communications

emphasis a full-time part of the church's program. In the fall of 1984, the church decided to hire Sidney full-time on the church staff. In this unusual circumstance, creativity and commitment were honored by the church, as they upheld their responsibility to the spiritual growth and commitment of an individual.



## VI. CREATING THE ETHICAL RESPONSE

The goal of a ministry to young adults in transition is to sustain them as they move to their decision points. When each person is provided with opportunities for spiritual growth, study of personal stories which provide models for life and participation in support community, the possibility for a new vision and a responsive lifestyle is inevitable. The church can create the environment for ministry to a critical life period that will result in some of its best participants. Persons who come through the period of crisis with a positive response are those who have a strong sense of personal ethics, and act accordingly in the world.

In order to create a personal ethical response, the church must help to create and sustain a vision for our young people. Visions and ways of life take place in particular contexts. They grow out of the symbols, languages and rites of communities.(3) Participation in the church should enforce the visions and ways of the Christian tradition. The Christian community requires sustaining relationships that maintain a sense of hope in the future. The church must provide opportunities for support and guidance that allow persons to grow as a result of adversity. This reflection on change creates the promise of

a new life. In the Christian context, this new life is participation in the creation of the Kingdom of God. We must seek, as a self-confident people, justice for all people, and we must remain at all times faithful to the Christian tradition.(4)

Ethical Christian behavior calls for a response to the world that is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Each individual is inspired to examine his/her own powers to shape human destiny.(5) These new shapes for contemporary witness, created as a vision in our young adults, are what God is calling them to be in the contemporary world.(6) There is no response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ except in the contemporary world. The commitment of the Christian is to be expressed in everything s/he does: leisure time, the work place, intimate relationships and the structures of society.(7) Within the resources and limitations of each person, Christians are called to participate in highly ambiguous enterprises necessary to human welfare.(8) The Christian is called to go to every point of human need, doing the best that is possible to satisfy that need within the imperfect circumstances of the world.(9) We are called to have: "creativity amid ambiguity, invention where there is imperfection."(10)

The resourceful, creative and ethical Christian decision-maker must be molded by the church during the young adult period. The vision of a just and faithful community must be taught hand-in-hand with the academic subjects of

business, literature, engineering, communications and medicine. Education for ethical decision makers includes a curriculum that emphasizes strong theological roots, ethical principles and sociological data. We must provide information that presents a Christian theological perspective. Ethical response is shaped by beliefs about God, the nature of humankind, and the meaning of salvation. The Christian theological norm is love. We must teach the overarching norms of love, courage and persistence.(11) Ethical principles are general guides to action which grow out of religious insight or out of the experience of actualizing values. Love as an ethical value implies a living commitment to truth telling, loyalty to one's word, the supremacy of human personality over economic goods, equality of opportunity, community and peace.(12) Finally, sociological data gives information about the situations in which we act. We must encourage our young people to examine data relevant to the issues about which we make a response.

To work towards the creation of ethical decision-makers is to enable each young person to look at his/her own life, as well as how life is related to other persons. Ethical decision-makers are created when each one examines his/her own motives in light of the ideals, principles and visions of the Christian community and makes decisions in response to those values. Christian values are enhanced when persons engage in creative dialogue, when they respond to the needs of others and when they seek to meet

needs based on the Gospel's concepts of love.(13)

The vision of the Christian community that is created for our young people emphasizes the way of Jesus Christ as the way of all Christian thinking. This means that actions lead not only from the world to God, but from God to the world.(14) The Christian Church has three essential tasks: 1) To call for conversion to the belief in the love of God in Christ as a basis for the creation of God's Kingdom; 2) To set the congregation in a relationship with the world that attends to the demands of the Gospel; and 3) To acknowledge Jesus Christ and his Gospel as Law.(15) Ethical decision-makers possess strong theological roots that motivate an understanding for response to human need. They are persons who respond ethically and understand that the scale of values for Christians demands faith and obedience to the Gospels.(16)

A partnership between young adults and the Christian Church community suggests a two-way interaction and a mutual investment. In each of the case studies, the opportunity for a decision point was present. Each young adult was given the opportunity to learn in the church community, to reflect on his/her experience, and to make a change based on a new vision for her/his life. In two of these cases, when the decision was made and a commitment to a new lifestyle was made, the church won two responsive adults to share the work of the Christian faith.

When we work to enhance the growth opportunities of

our young people, we are working not only for the good of individuals, but also to strengthen the work force of the entire Christian Church. The church is not some ideal community, but a particular people who must find the way to sustain its existence generation after generation. We must hear and enact, in the contemporary world, the stories of Jesus. We must be a social witness, we must open ourselves and our lives to God through prayer.(17)

The church is a task force; we must constantly train new workers. The goal of a ministry to young adults should be to communicate ways and visions of life that promote the case of Christian faith in action. We need decision-makers who can confront issues with an ethic that envisions the coming of God's peaceable Kingdom on earth.(18) In the context of genetics, bio-ethics and abortion, we must teach the value of human life. In the era of nuclear power, we must stress issues of peace. In a time where women, immigrants, minorities and the handicapped struggle for freedom, mobility and acceptance, we must communicate the Christian mandate for liberation. Our goal in a ministry to young adults is to educate our contemporary church and its future generations to respond to critical issues in an ethical manner.

In two recent publications, Morality Made Simple But Not Easy (19) by Joanmarie Smith, and Being Good and Doing Good (20) by Martin Marty, two ethical thinkers stress the importance of practicing decision-making. Either of these

short texts is a good beginning for a study of the day-to-day ethical decisions. Smith stresses "practice, practice," and states that ethical decisions are never easy. She deals with common present-day issues, and encourages persons to educate themselves before making a decision. Marty looks at the Biblical concept of love and stresses that "doing good" flows from "being good." The important concept is that we must educate a person so that his/her "ways and understanding" is not in isolation from his/her actions.

Ministry to young persons in education, who are in the transition from older youth to young adult, is a task that commands our greatest efforts for the greater good. We must provide a nurturing community, teach the ideals and beliefs of the Christian faith such that they focus on a new way of living, and nurture our young people in the midst of their reflections and growth until they reach their decision point. When we do these things we are God's people, creating sustaining and building God's kingdom.

CHAPTER FOUR: FOOTNOTES

1. "Lesson Five," Alive Now  
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2. James M. Gustafson, Theology and Ethics  
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3. Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom  
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4. Harvey Seifert, Power Where The Action Is  
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5. Ibid., 5.
6. Ibid., 21.
7. Ibid., 27.
8. Ibid., 28.
9. Ibid., 29.
10. Ibid., 31.
11. Ibid., 33.
12. C. Eugene Conover, Personal Ethics  
(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968) 73.
13. Joseph Fletcher, Moral Responsibility  
(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967) 231.
14. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics  
(New York: Macmillan, 1963) 358.
15. Ibid.
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17. Hauerwas, 107.
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APPENDIX A

MEDITATION AND PRAYER:

THE JOURNEY OF YOURSELF

Meditation and Prayer: The Journey of Yourself  
Study Guide Contents

- I. Introduction to "The Journey of Yourself"
- II. Leader's Guide
- III. Four Study Sessions
- IV. Growing Along the Way; Prayer Activities
- V. ~~Changes on the Journey; Evaluation~~
- VI. Annotated Bibliography on Meditation and Prayer

## I. Introduction to "The Journey of Yourself"

Prayer is a very important part of a personal response to spiritual enrichment. The following exercises were designed to help individuals focus on their needs and to share in an atmosphere of support. This particular model has been used with persons from junior high school age to senior citizen. It is especially helpful for young adults as they seek to find answers to problems, overcome daily stress and invest in some kind of practical discipline.

There is no formula for a successful prayer life. A discussion of this kind, however, encourages persons to open themselves to instruction and inspiration. One of the most exciting things about young adults sharing in a prayer study is that each learns that s/he is not alone. The sessions emphasize sharing personal experience and reflecting on things that one has overcome as well as setting goals for the future. A time for study and spiritual discipline can cause persons to approach life with a new sense of energy and motivation.

This study guide contains: four sets of questions for each of four sessions, a leader's guide for leading each group discussion, special suggestions for activities to enhance spiritual growth, an evaluation and an annotated bibliography. The study guide is best used if each person

is given a worksheet, and after recording his/her thoughts shares some things with the group.

When persons pray and share together, growth is inevitable.

### III. Leader's Guide

#### SESSION I

#### KNOWING YOU, KNOWING GOD

1. Emphasize each individual's personal experience and feelings.
2. Stress the importance of role models; civic leaders, teachers, grandparents. Discuss how these persons help us to grow by modeling traits of strength, faith, leadership, endurance. Reflect on whether these persons may have had a strong spiritual life.
3. Discuss the presence of God in our lives outside of traditional settings (worship, church). Talk about how God works for us when we are unaware.
4. Discuss the needs for prayer at all times (good and bad, highs and lows). Discuss prayer as a spiritual resting place for problems, and a time for celebration of joys.

## SESSION II

### UNDERSTANDING PRAYER

1. Use the Lord's prayer as an example of prayer that covers all needs.
2. Discuss the power of prayer:
  - a. healing
  - b. to alleviate world problems (beyond our control)
  - c. in times of stress, pain or loneliness
  - d. to find direction
  - e. to express need or thanksgiving
3. Encourage participants to begin some form of prayer/spiritual discipline:
  - a. a journal
  - b. personal Bible study
  - c. regular quiet time
  - d. daily prayers (using a study resource)
  - e. prayer or discussion with a pastor, teacher or friend
4. Discuss the different forms of prayer and their uses.
  - a. THANKSGIVING: offering our prayers as thanks for God's gift of life, health, nourishment
  - b. CONFESSION: sharing our failures or shortcomings, acknowledging to God the things that we have done that are wrong and the things that we could have done to be more responsible Christians
  - c. PRAISE: giving personal expressions of thanks for God's greatness and love
  - d. PETITION: asking God's blessings for our needs



- e. INTERCESSION: prayers for the sick, bereaved, imprisoned or others who need God's blessings
- f. GUIDANCE: asking for guidance and direction as we make decisions and attempt to solve life's problems

### SESSION III

#### PRAYER IS A RELATIONSHIP

1. Share some models of relationships with God, persons who have led deeply committed lives:
  - a. The philosophy of non-violence as practiced in the life and ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Read portions of Dr. King's book, Stride Toward Freedom (pages 219-220)\* and discuss how prayer can become action and encourage change in the contemporary world. \*King, Jr., Martin Luther, Stride Toward Freedom, Harper and Row, New York, 1958.
  - b. Discuss portions of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's experience in prison during the Nazi occupation of Germany. A good resource is Letters and Papers from Prison\* edited by Eberhard Bethge. Bonhoeffer's letters include prayers and poetry that will stimulate reflection. \*Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, Letters and Papers from Prison, Eberhard Bethge, ed., Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., New York, 1953.
  - c. A discussion of Ruth's decision to follow her mother-in-law Naomi would help to open up reflection on life decisions and decision-making. In her commitment to the God of Israel, Ruth makes an important statement about faith and lifestyle. The Book of Ruth is very short and a good resource for group sharing.
2. Examples of Jesus' spiritual discipline. Use one of these situations to discuss a relationship with God. The situations will help to focus on how God speaks to our life situations and what response is appropriate.
  - a. Jesus in the wilderness; Matthew 4:1-12
  - b. Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees; Matthew 12
  - c. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane; Matthew 26:30-56
3. Discuss the implications of personal faith in a strong

relationship with God.

4. Discuss prayer as a form of communication. How can a relationship with God be enhanced by using prayer as two-way communication?

SESSION IV

PRAYER IS A DISCIPLINE AND A WAY OF LIFE

1. Use some relaxation exercises and/or guided meditation in this session. A good resource is Opening to God. \*Stahl, Carolyn, Opening to God, The Upper Room, Nashville, 1977.
2. Discuss times and places that prayer is appropriate.
3. Have participants work out a proposed plan for personal prayer discipline. An example would be the one cited on the following page, written by Dr. Paul Jones, professor at the St. Paul School of Theology.
4. Have each individual write a letter to themselves stating areas that need growth as well as blessings. Keep the letters and mail them to the participants in six months.

## RULE: A COMMITMENT TO DISCIPLINE

by Dr. Paul Jones

1. I shall engage in at least a beginning and ending daily office, involving minimally a short liturgy of scripture and prayer.
2. I shall participate regularly in corporate worship and celebration of the sacraments.
3. I shall seek through regular study to enlarge my knowledge and skills for practicing the Christian faith.
4. I shall commit myself to individual and corporate activities in behalf of justice and the vision of a new society commensurate with the Christian vision of a new heaven and a new earth.
5. I shall increase my support of the work of the Church and of worthy causes at least by one percent of my gross adjusted income per year until I attain the level of the tithe.
6. I shall engage in periodic examinations of my style of life (including choices and location of home, furniture, recreation, transportation, clothing etc.) and move deliberately in the direction of simplicity, stewardship, low consumption, energy efficiency, and economy.
7. I shall care for my body by means of regular exercise, a healthy diet, and prudent use of stimulants and drugs.
8. I shall endeavor to maintain a creative balance between: work and sabbatical leisure; family, friends and self; daily engagement and silence; and other rhythms providing wholeness.
9. I shall acquire a friend in the faith as a Spiritual Director with whom I can share periodically my faithfulness to this rule and who can help me discern God's intent for my life as providentially led.
10. I shall participate at least annually in a retreat whose purpose is to reflect upon my life as response to God's call to radical faithfulness.

### III. Four Study Sessions

#### SESSION I

#### KNOWING YOU, KNOWING GOD

1. Three things about you that are unique:
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
2. Three special gifts that you have to share with others:
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
3. Three models (outside of your family and Christ) that are an inspiration for your life, and why:
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
4. How does God work in your life?
5. Three things you want your prayers to do for you:
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
6. Three things you want to accomplish with your prayers:
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.

## SESSION II

### UNDERSTANDING PRAYER

1. What difficulties do you have when you pray?
2. When is it easy to pray?
3. When is it hard to pray?
4. What changes do you want to see:
  - A. in your personal life
  - B. in your family/community
  - C. with your friends
  - D. in the world
5. Record below some ways you think that will help to make changes and growth in your spiritual life, and in the world.
6. Name some times and situations when it is appropriate to use the different forms of prayer about which you have learned today.
  - A. THANKSGIVING
  - B. CONFESSION
  - C. PRAISE
  - D. PETITION
  - E. INTERCESSION
  - F. GUIDANCE

SESSION III

PRAYER IS A RELATIONSHIP

1. What is your relationship with God (i.e. formal, casual, personal)?
2. By what name(s) do you call God?
3. How is God alive in your life?
4. What are your physical and material needs?
5. What are your spiritual and emotional needs?



SESSION IV

PRAYER IS A DISCIPLINE AND A WAY OF LIFE

1. Why should I meditate?
2. How can I meditate?
3. Three times in the day to day routine when meditation may help?
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
4. What are some ways that the disciplines of prayer and meditation can change my life?
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.

#### IV. GROWING ALONG THE JOURNEY

##### ACTIVITIES TO GO AND GROW BY:

1. List six of your favorite scriptures below; verses that are inspiring and give you strength and deepen your faith:
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
  - D.
  - E.
  - F.
2. During the next four weeks be intentional about finding some quiet alone time. Record your thoughts and feelings.
3. Allow the voice of God to enter your consciousness. Pray by listening for the spirit. What do you hear? Record any significant communication.
4. Find a time to read meditative material, or record your thoughts, each day in the next four weeks.
5. Write notes of cheer and inspiration to friends or relatives whom you have not seen or visited in a while.
6. Make a special effort to pray for those with whom you have had angry words or anxious moments.
7. Take quick vacations in your mind (one to three minutes) to places where you have felt warmth or comfort, especially spots with water. Go back to those places and relive your feelings; sense smells, tastes and emotions. Feel yourself relax.

V. CHANGES ON THE JOURNEY

EVALUATION

1. What are the three most important things you have learned about yourself in this four week study?
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
2. What are three ways you will try to change your prayer life?
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
3. What things would you have added to this study?

What would you have left out?

COMMENTS:

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THE JOURNEY OF YOURSELF

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Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1968.

These two texts are excellent resources for prayer and worship with young people. The prayers center on personal and contemporary issues and questions. The language is clear and simple. This material is especially good for opening and closing meditations during a group time.

3. Herbert F. Brokering, Surprise Me, Jesus  
Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973.

This book of prayers is clearly indexed for easy reference to prayers for many occasions and situations. This book is especially good as an example for writing one's own prayers.

4. Maxie Dunnam, The Workbook of Living Prayer  
Nashville: Upper Room, 1974.

This excellent resource provides daily guides for prayer. It is especially good for use with a small sharing group. Designed for personal use or group sharing, this text encourages prayer as a daily discipline. It is also very educational, providing an understanding of different kinds of prayer and encouraging examination of one's style and practice of prayer.

5. Anne Murrow Lindbergh, Gift from the Sea  
New York: Vintage Books, 1955.

In this book, Lindbergh shares her reflections during a time of personal retreat. This is excellent for group sharing. The text is short and clearly written, easy reading. This is also an excellent example of a personal journal.

6. Mark Link, S.J., You  
Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1976.

This text, subtitled "Prayers for Beginners and

Those Who Have Forgotten How," is prepared especially for "students," youth and adults who want to learn more about prayer and want to deepen the experience of their personal prayer life. It is a daily guide for several weeks of guided prayer and study.

7. Mark Link, S.J., He is the Still Point of the Turning World  
Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1971.
8. Mark Link, S.J., Take Off Your Shoes  
Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1972.
9. Mark Link, S.J., In the Stillness is the Dancing  
Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1972.

All three of these texts are full of prayers, poems, reflections, words of inspiration and meditations. These books are good for personal prayer, worship and they provide dozens of thought provoking passages for use in a study or sharing group.

10. Henri J.M. Nouwen, Making All Things New  
San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.
11. Henri J.M. Nouwen, Out of Solitude  
Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1975.
12. Henri J.M. Nouwen, Reaching Out  
Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966.
13. Henri J.M. Nouwen, The Way of the Heart  
New York: Seabury Press, 1981.
14. Henri J.M. Nouwen, With Open Hands  
Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1975.

Nouwen is one of the most inspired writers in the area of prayer and spirituality. His writing is challenging and thought provoking. His style is easy and comfortable, almost as though one were in conversation with him. With Open Hands is especially good for use with a small group. Nouwen is also an excellent resource for personal study.

15. Michel Quoist, Prayers  
New York: Avon Books, 1963.

This text has several meditations on various subjects and situations. It combines scripture, reflection and prayer. This book is easy reading and useful in many situations.

16. Howard Thurman, Deep is the Hunger  
Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1951.

This is a book of weekly devotions. It is  
excellent for personal or corporate use.

APPENDIX B

THE STORIES OF OUR LIVES

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE STORIES OF OUR LIVES

### Study Guide Contents

- I. Introduction to "The Stories of Our Lives"
- II. Outline for Study Sessions
- III. Four Study Sessions
- IV. Leaders Guide
- V. Annotated Bibliography from "Abingdon Faith Journey"
- VI. Suggested Study Texts



## I. INTRODUCTION TO "THE STORIES OF OUR LIVES"

For years persons in the Christian Community have given their "witness" or "testimony," sharing their life experiences and events in light of their faith. Faith in what cannot be seen or proved, is the primary ingredient of a Christian lifestyle. What makes faith work is really an unknown, but it is the spirit that enlivens and motivates persons to live in accord with the concepts that are espoused by the Christian religion and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In light of the many and varied and certain traumas, struggles and challenges of persons who are working toward a Christian lifestyle, it seems appropriate to share life stories or the "witness" of persons who have made strong commitments, with those who are in the process of learning to make decisions and commitments.

This study guide is provided in the hopes that it will help young adults to gain some insight and inspiration from the lives of persons who are involved in meaningful life journeys. This study seeks to reveal human life as a valuable and instructive gift. Life stories are meant not only to be experienced by an individual, but also to instruct and captivate the spirits of others. The sharing of life stories and the reflection on the process of faith

and commitment is important and helpful to understanding personal growth and change. In the sharing of life stories we learn that faithfulness is usually described as a response to a "voice" or "calling" that comes from within. It helps us understand what issues persons have confronted, and what questions they have answered. We learn that individuals establish meaning and commitment by living in response to compelling forces and strong ideals. Life stories reveal the ongoing process of growth, reflection, response and change.

The following study is put together to accompany the "Journeys in Faith" series currently in publication by Abingdon Press. The authors, who are all alive, are dynamic and responsible Christians. They share their stories, dreams and faith with energy and vision. The texts are short, and easy to read and comprehend. The study is intended especially for persons in the young adult age group who are facing major decisions and seeking help with meaning and purpose in life.

In addition to the study and leader's guide, there is an annotated bibliography of texts from the Abingdon "Journeys in Faith" series. It is hoped that this study will encourage and motivate young persons to affirm and build their own witness.

## II. OUTLINE FOR: "THE STORIES OF OUR LIVES"

(suggested outline for group meetings)

1. Opening and Welcome
2. Read a scripture that includes a life changing situation for an individual. Examples might include:  
  
Noah - (Genesis 6:9-22)  
  
Moses - (Exodus 3:1-6, 10-12)  
  
Ruth - (Ruth 1)  
  
Woman at the well - (John 4:8-26)  
  
Zaccheus - (Luke 19:1-10)
3. Discuss the scripture. The following questions might be asked:  
  
A. What decision did (Noah) have to make about (his/her) life?  
  
B. How did the person's faith play a part in their decision making process?  
  
C. Put yourself in (Ruth's) place. How would you have felt in a similar situation?
4. Work on the current session and discussion.
5. Close with a reading or inspirational piece from the writer you are studying or some other biography or autobiography.
6. Close with the sharing of concerns or a prayer.

### III. Four Study Sessions

#### SESSION 1

#### SEARCHING: LIFE'S QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the questions that the author asks as s/he shares his/her story?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are some of his/her joys and sorrows?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. With what portion of his/her story did you most identify? Why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Name some of the author's compelling life forces (situations and events that inspired or motivated the author to think or act in a certain way).

SESSION II

DREAMS: WHAT IS LIFE'S CALLING?

1. To what ideas/ideals has the author committed his/her life?
2. What are his/her dreams?
3. When does the writer rely on faith?
4. How and why is the author a Christian?
5. What are three questions you would like to ask the author about his/her faith journey?

SESSION III

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS: HOW CAN I RELATE?

1. What are some of the questions that you have had to ask in your life?
2. What are some of your joys and sorrows?
3. What are some of the compelling forces and influences in your life?
4. How has faith been an active part of your life and decision-making process?

SESSION IV

EVALUATION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

1. What are three important things you have learned from the author?
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
2. What are three important things you have learned about yourself?
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
3. To what do you wish to commit your life and why?
4. How can you share your faith journey with others?

#### IV. LEADER'S GUIDE

##### THE STORIES OF OUR LIVES

##### GENERAL SUGGESTIONS AND GUIDELINES

1. Be sure that you have read the text thoroughly. If the participants do not have the time to read the text, a thorough book review might be appropriate. The "Faith Journey" series from Abingdon Press is designed for quick reading and is easily comprehended. Have some answers ready for the questions in the study guide in case they are needed to encourage discussion and involvement.
2. Remember that the questions in the study guide are meant to be discussion starters. Remain flexible to the needs of the group. You may have time to discuss only one or two questions. Be aware of the needs of the group and the individuals in the study.
3. There are no right answers. Each participant will have different answers based on his or her own experiences.
4. Encourage everyone to participate. This study should not be a group therapy session for one or two persons. Call on individuals and ask them to share their responses (if they are willing) and keep the discussion moving.



## SESSION I

### SEARCHING: LIFE'S QUESTIONS???

Purpose: The purpose of this session is to acquaint the participants with the questions and struggles that the autobiographer has had to face in his or her life.

1. Introduce the writer to the study group participants. Give a general overview of the text and the person's life and accomplishments (the annotated bibliography may be helpful).
2. Stress the humanness of the author. Encourage participants to see how everyone makes mistakes, has problems and feels frustrated in the process of living.
3. Encourage the participants to deal with life forces; such as pressures toward justice or cultural change or confrontation with age-old systems. What makes a person want to be an agent of change?
4. Emphasize that all persons have joys and sorrows and that persons build on good and bad experiences.

## SESSION II

### DREAMS: WHAT IS LIFE'S CALLING?

Purpose: This session is designed to help participants deal with life's calling, or the conviction or impulse that motivates individuals to accomplish certain tasks, or live according to certain ideals. Participants will be encouraged to understand what situations or experiences called the author to assume certain life tasks. It is hoped that the participants may be encouraged or inspired to examine their own "calling."

1. Discuss the term "calling." Use a dictionary or a theological dictionary. Consider Biblical characters who were "called" by God to accomplish certain tasks: Noah, Moses, the mother of Jesus.
2. Relate the importance of having life goals and dreams. These are important to understand in order to clarify what one is "called" to do in life.
3. Emphasize the idea of commitment. Help the participants to understand the relationship between "calling" or the conviction to accomplish certain tasks, or live by certain ideals and "commitment," deliberate action towards accomplishment of certain tasks or a pledge or promise to live a certain way.
4. Discuss the meaning of faith in the Christian context.
5. Discuss the concept of a "faith journey" (living and working towards specific goals and ideas with the understanding that there is a divine motivation and trust that allows an individual to face and confront the obstacles in life).

### SESSION III

#### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS: HOW CAN I RELATE?

Purpose: This session is designed to encourage participants to look at their own lives and begin to discern their own "callings" or life purpose. It is hoped that each participant will be able to take a close look at his or her life experiences and begin to clarify what is important and what his or her purpose in life might be.

1. Emphasize what can be learned from joys and sorrows.
2. Give examples of "compelling life forces" from the autobiographer such as fighting injustice or speaking out about nuclear power. Other examples of such forces might be: the continuing presence of the church on one's life, life experiences in the sixties, a divorce or death. These "life forces" or experiences can be varied. Encourage the participants to examine significant life events.
3. Share personal experiences of how faith helped in making a decision or in living through a difficult situation (faith is trust in an unseen power or force; trust in God). Use examples from the text.
4. Stress the fact that faith is not magic, but a sense of trust in the unseen, in God, when there is no visible answer.
5. Use biblical examples of persons who responded to crises of faith in the unseen (raising of Lazarus, John 11; healing of the man born blind, John 9).

#### SESSION IV

##### EVALUATION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Purpose: The final session is designed to help participants to be intentional about making decisions. After learning about the author's questions and decisions and one another's questions and life experiences, participants will hopefully be encouraged to examine their own life purpose and experience, both reflecting on important events of the past and planning the future. The ultimate purpose of this and all other sessions is to show that every life has a meaning and purpose which can be directed.

1. Stress the importance of all life experiences and events.
2. Discuss the importance of continuing to learn about one's self by continually reflecting on experiences and events.
3. Emphasize the relationship between faith and meaning in life. Discuss ways that persons can grow in confidence about decision-making and life direction. Examples:
  - A. Continue further Bible study. Read about persons who have made critical life decisions.
  - B. Do further study of biographies and autobiographies.
  - C. Interview parents, grandparents and other family members to learn of their life stories.
  - D. Talk to your pastor, counselor or other trusted friend about how to make life decisions or how to choose a purpose for your life's work.
4. Stress the ongoing concept of life. Life is a journey, a process. We continue to grow and change and learn all the way to the end of the journey.
5. Encourage persons to never give up or trivialize a life experience.
6. Communicate that God is with each person; learn to listen to the Spirit within.

V. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

JOURNEYS IN FAITH

1. Berrigan, Daniel. Ten Commandments for the Long Haul. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

The paper cover of this text says that Daniel Berrigan is "the quintessential activist." These words continued to flash through my consciousness as I read through his ten commandments. Berrigan is confrontive, opinionated, radical and alive. He lives in a constant tension with the issues of the day. His commandments are the not so subtle suggestions that the Gospel continues to demand, even compel a response to God's people in need.

Berrigan is a man, who though a priest, has maintained a confrontative and public image, speaking out loudly on certain moral and ethical issues. His "Ten Commandments" are reminders of his own continuing struggle to be loyal to the Gospel. He uses New Testament texts to discuss ethical concerns in light of Biblical teachings. He shares his thoughts based on his own actions and involvement with contemporary problems: materialism, issues of life and death, liberation and teaching to the poor and imprisoned. His reflections and journal musing allow the reader to share and explore and grow with a man who continues to ask questions about his commitment.

For me this book was a good study because it quieted my self-righteous tendencies. It reminded me that I am part and parcel of a consumer economic system that by its very nature defeats the purpose of the Gospel. Berrigan also calls readers to ask themselves important questions about values and even about the quality of life, or the future of existence.

Not many readers will be able to identify with Berrigan. He is just a wild man. It will be easy to study his personal faith statements and remain objective. Most people cannot relate to the lifestyle and experience of a priest, especially one who is so radical. His story is conducive especially to the discussion of issues, action and the future.

2. Brown, Robert McAfee. Creative Dislocation. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980.

Brown shares his experiences of "dislocation." These are not only the physical movements that he has made from one place to another, but also the movement in his life and thought that has changed his way of doing, being and thinking.

"The biggest dislocation in my life has been the discovery that the perspective I have entertained most of my life is too narrow, parochial, and class-oriented to do justice to what is going on in the world..."

Robert McAfee Brown is reknowned as an academic. But his own questions and struggles sent him from the University to the school of the modern world. His story, creatively described with written snapshots, shares his experiences with people around the world; the Holy Land, the villages ravaged by the war in Viet-nam and the hungry people in the villages of Latin America. Brown takes a world view of contemporary issues and forces himself out of a narrow or simplistic view of the concept of "human liberation." This text is autobiographical in that it opened the door to the spirit of a man involved and consumed in the continuing journey of life and faith. His story is the revelation of ideas called to action.

This text is perfect for discussing what influences one's perspective. Brown's relation of his movement to "larger horizons" or "smaller world" gives the reader an opportunity to examine his/her own parochiality. One of the most important aspects of personal growth is to look at one's experience as one of the infinite possibilities for a "life's journey." Brown broadens his horizons so that other possibilities and experiences affect not only his learning and growth but also his response and action as a Christian. Robert McAfee Brown gives some important lessons upon which to reflect for life in the eighties. In a caring way, he shares what he has learned as a guiding light for others.

This book will inspire conversation, confrontation and action. It is a perfect study for persons looking for guidelines as they make important life decisions, and plans for the future.

3. Cone, James H. My Soul Looks Back. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982.

James Cone reports pieces of his life story in this text and shares the intellectual development of his theology, and the compelling need he had (has) to be a theologian. For Cone, it is important to start at the beginning of his life to point out the traditions, practice and influence of the black church and the black community on his personal life. James Cone in his writings is considered a "radical" in black and white communities. His story, however, reveals that he was compelled by his own experience to confront oppression and tradition because of his understanding of the Christian message; a message he learned growing up black in a white world.

Cone, in beginning with his early experiences as a youth in Bearden, Arkansas shares his growth and his calling. He talks openly about the growing discontent and contradictions he feels with the message of liberation that he understands to be the import of the Gospel, and the

separation, racism and violence of his life in Arkansas. Cone's personal experiences of alienation with the Christian community, both in the black and white situations, calls him to write and teach about the Gospel of liberation. His story shows how one man has reflected on his life and made a response and a commitment to speak out against evil and for the oppressed.

Cone is aggressive and somewhat angry. Those traits however, are practical and necessary for someone who feels compelled to bring a new vision. Cone is inspiring because he listens, even in the midst of his determined will to make certain statements, to the viewpoints and experiences of others. James Cone has learned how to stop along the journey gathering what he needs and reflecting on where he must go. His story is personal, but his influence is powerful.

4. Cox, Harvey. Just As I Am. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983.

Harvey Cox is my hero. He is lively and vibrant and warm. He shares his story as the drama of several different kinds of encounters. Reading his story allows one to feel as though you are in a room with him, listening and learning, comforted by a man who is still looking around wondering where he is going. Cox is a master of language and story. He uses several styles and incidents to share his autobiographical statement. He gives insight to his life, his relationships, his growth, his spiritual maturity.

Cox recounts episodes and events in his life that strengthened, tested and confirmed his faith and his ministry. He is honest and "colorful." He confronts class differences - social and economic, and discusses his reasons for "staying Baptist."

This text is easy to read as a whole or in parts. It not only relates the author's faith journey, but also allows scrutinization of various life episodes. One can surely identify with the candor and energy of Harvey Cox. Any portion of it would give the reader a chance to reflect, question and gain new insight into spiritual maturity and spiritual growth. Cox is a personal and caring friend in the sharing of his story.

Harvey Cox shares in detail many of his life chapters and events. He starts with one of his early ancestors and moves through his life reflecting especially on the theme of war and the evil of human destruction. Having grown up a short distance from the mass grave of Revolutionary soldiers, he shares the impact of that experience as a life compelling force in his journey to the Berlin Wall, Golansk, Hiroshima and his life in a Boston ghetto. Cox shares that all of life is a significant exchange, experience a teacher, and reflection the mode for growth. Cox is self-critical, open and creative. He allows the reader to relive with him life experiences of

significant impact.

5. Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey. Speech, Silence, Action! The Cycle of Faith. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980.

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott shares her hopeful and inspired vision of "a New Humanity, a New World." Her reflections center on a formula for creation of a new world order: "speech, silence, action." She is determined that injustice can be scourged from the earth if Christians confront the power of the gospel and move from verbage to action.

Dr. Mollenkott is a growing, changing Christian whose staunch conservative background is a shocking backdrop for a person who has grown and revisioned her faith into action that includes acceptance, understanding and even love for such persons as homosexuals. Her story is very feminine and open, even radical. The scriptures that once provided a narrow and exclusive lifestyle for her, have opened up new possibilities and new hope for meeting and overcoming injustice.

This text is perfect for the numbers of persons who are currently finding comfort in "conservative Christianity." Mollenkott's growth, confrontation and deep commitment express to the reader the difficulty of accepting easy par answers to the gospel message. She is a faithful teller and doer, inspiring the reader and instructing person to study, listen and act on God's word.

6. Tobin, Mary Luke. Hope Is an Open Door. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

Mary Luke Tobin is a part of the community of the Sisters of Loretto. Already having chosen a life path that is guided and enlightened by serious self-searching and introspection, she shares the "open doors" in her life that have allowed her to continue to grow and to participate in the changing face of the world Christian community. She shares the encounters and teaching of the inspiration of Thomas Merton, as well as reflections of Vatican II and her own community.

For Mary Luke Tobin the encounter with the Gospel is central to confrontation with the evils of social injustice and oppression. Her voice is heard in an appeal to tear down barriers, and to rebuild the Christian community. She allows that the message of the Gospel must be heard in contemporary times, and through prayer and action we must work with the poor and "make peace with various kinds of racism, sexism, classism and oppressive forms of capitalism..."

This text would be especially good for a special interest group, one that is working with women's issues or studying ways of understanding prayer. It is easy to read and very powerful. It allows the reader to glimpse not only



the journey of a life - but the changing face of the church  
and the Christian community.

### Suggested Study Texts

The teacher or leader of a study on life stories may wish to do some reading in the area of moral development and the search for meaning. The following texts include helpful information for understanding the growth process in young adults and the importance of sharing life stories or faith journeys.

1. Erik H. Erikson, Identity Youth and Crisis. New York: Norton, 1968.

This text is a classic work on the problems of youth and identity crisis. Erikson's analysis is technical, but reveals important insight into the mind and experience of youth. Chapters five and six are especially helpful to a study group leader.

2. James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1940.

Fowler has made an important contribution to the study of growth and development. His stages constitute an overview of the development of faith. This text, also very technical, allows the teacher or leader to follow along with a theory of growth. Review of Part IV would be especially helpful in working with the program of sharing life stories.

3. James W. Fowler and Robin Lovin, Trajectories in Faith. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980.

Fowler and Lovin and others have told the faith journeys of five persons in this text. Reading of any one of the stories will illustrate the successful use of life stories in the spiritual and moral development process. The introduction to this book reviews Fowler's stages of faith and gives an explanation for the use of biography in the study of moral development. This book is quick easy reading and easy to comprehend.